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Dhanañjānī Sutta

The Dhanañjānī Discourse | S 7.1

Theme: Killing what benefits us?

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2007, 2014

This translation commemorates the adoption of 25th December as “Buddhist Renewal Day,” to reflect on the blessings of the Three Jewels (2007).

1 Dhanañjānī’s Thunder

According to the Saṃyutta Commentary (SA 1:225), **the Dhanañjānī clan** is reputed to be highest of the brahmin clans. They believe that while the other brahmins had been born from Brahmā’s mouth, they themselves had been from the top of his head. The brahminee **Dhanañjānī** of the Dhanañjānī Sutta (S 7.1) lives in Rājagaha. She is probably identical to the brahminee called **Dhānañjānī** in **the (Deva) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100),¹ who, while engaged in her duties, constantly sings an udana [inspired utterance] to the Buddha,² and her husband, the brahmin Bhāradvāja,³ would close his ears to it. The Commentary says that she is a streamwinner.⁴

Now the brahmin would from time to time invites other brahmins to a banquet. One day, the brahmin invites a large number of his peers to such a banquet. On the eve of the great day, he warns Dhanañjānī not to disgrace him before his brahmin peers, and tries to make her promise not to utter her udana. **The Saṃyutta Commentary** gives this account:

[Brahmin:] “Madam, tomorrow, if you are to honour that shaveling ascetic before the seated brahmins, I will slice you from head to foot with that knife (*khagga*), like slicing the top of a bamboo shoot, and make a heap of you!” Then he uttered this verse:

*Iminā maṇḍalaggena
pādato yāva matthakā
kaḷīram iva chejjāmi
yadi m’icchaṃ na kāhasi*

With this round-headed knife [mandalagra],
from head to foot,
I will cut you up like a bamboo shoot,
if you do not do as I wish.

*Sace buddhoti bhaṇasi,
sace dhammoti bhāsasi
sace saṅghoti kittesi
jīvantī me nivesane*

If you say, “Buddha,”
if you utter, “Dharma,”
if you praise, “Saṅgha,”
they will live [prosper] in my house!

But the noble disciple (*ariya, sāvīkā*) remained unshaken like the earth itself, unmoved like Mt Sineru. Then she says this to him:

*Sace me aṅgam-aṅgāni
kāmaṃ chejjasi brāhmaṇa
n’evāhaṃ viraṃissāmi,
Buddha, seṭṭhassa sāsanaṃ.*

If all my limbs [If limb by limb, me]
you were to cut up, brahmin, as you wish,
never will I ever forsake
the teaching of the supreme Buddha.

¹ M 100.3/2:210 @ SD 10.9.

² On the possibility that Dhanañjānī suffers from arctic hysteria or latah, see **Saṅgārava S** (M 100), SD 10.9 3.1.

³ The Suttas mention **Saṅgārava** (M 100/2:209-213) & **Asurindaka** (S 7.3/1:163 f) as his younger brothers. Comy adds that he is the eldest of the Bhāradvājas, and brother of **Akkosaka Bhāradvāja**, who also joins the order and becomes an arhat (S 7.2/1:161-164; SA 1:229; MA 3:452), as do his other younger brothers, **Sundarika** (Sn 3.4; S 7.9) and **Piṅgala(ka) Bhāradvāja** (S 1:164) (MA 3:452). See **Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 3.4), SD 22.2 (1).

⁴ MA 3:451 = SA 1:226.

*Nāham okkā vara,dharā
sakkā rodhayitum jinā;
dhītāham buddha,seṭṭhassa
chinda vā maṃ vadhassu vā*

A noble torch-bearer am I, not one
to obstruct the champion of the Sakyas!
A daughter of the supreme Buddha am I—
go ahead and cut me or kill me!

She uttered 500 such verses, called called Dhanañjānī’s Thunder. (SA 1:225)

Failing both to coax and to threaten her, the brahmin resignedly tells her to do what she likes.

On the banquet day, while waiting on the guests, says the Majjhima Commentary, her impulse grows so great that, laying down bowl and spoon, she chants her udana recollecting the Buddha (MA 3:451). The Saṃyutta and Dhammapada Commentaries, however, adds that Dhanañjānī, while serving the brahmins, stumbles (over a stack of firewood, says the former), and immediately kneels down and pays homage to the Buddha.⁵ The scandalized brahmin guests get up, spit out the food defiled by the presence of an unbeliever, revile the brahmin host and scurry out of the house without finishing their meal. The brahmin Bhāra,dvāja then approaches the Buddha and challenges him with a trick question, but is instead inspired by the answer [§§7-8] and joins the order. [§§9-11].

A similar account is given in **the (Deva) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100), after which the brahmin Saṅgārava, after scolding the brahminee Dhānañjānī, tells her that he will challenge the Buddha to show that he is not such a great man after all. Hence, she is also responsible for Saṅgārava’s visit to the Buddha. Both she and Saṅgārava are, however, said to have “dwelled” (*paṭivasati*) in Caṇḍala,kappa (M 100.2).⁶ It is probable that Dhanañjānī visits Saṅgārava on that occasion, or that she has moved there after her husband Bhāra,dvāja becomes a monk. Both Caṇḍala,kappa and Rāja,gaha are in Kosala.

2 Akkosaka Bhāra,dvāja Vatthu

[The Dhanañjānī story is also found in the Dhammapada Commentary (DhA 26.16), where she is called Dhanañjayānī.⁷ The opening is similar to that of **the (Deva) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100), but where the brahminee is named Dhānañjānī.⁸ The story is told in connection with Dh 399, and is here translated in full.]

SD 45.5(2)

Akkosaka Bhāra,dvāja Vatthu

The Story of Akkosaka Bhāra,dvāja | DhA 26.16/4:161-163

Theme: The Buddha’s patience

1 Akkosan’ti. This Dharma teaching is given by the Teacher while he was residing in the Bamboo Grove concerning the brahmin Akkosaka Bhāra,dvāja. [DhA 4:161]

2 Now, Akkosaka Bhāradvāja had an elder brother named Bhāradvāja whose wife, the brahminess, was a streamwinner. Whenever she sneezed or coughed, she would utter this inspired verse (*udāna*):

“Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa!”⁹

[“Homage to them, the Lord [the Blessed One], the arhat, the fully self-awakened one!”]

3 One day, [162] while the distribution of food to the brahmins was in progress, she stumbled, and at once uttered the inspired verse, as usual, in a loud voice. The brahmin (the elder Bhāra,dvāja) was angered.

4 Thinking, “No matter where it is, when this outcaste of a woman (*vasalī*) stumbles, she utters in praise of this shaveling monk in this way!” He then said,

“Now, outcaste, I will go and worst this teacher of yours in a debate!”¹⁰

⁵ SA 1:225; DhA 4:161.

⁶ M 100,1/2:209 @ SD 10.9.

⁷ DhA 26.16/4:161-163.

⁸ M 100,2/2:209 @ SD 10.9.

⁹ This famous chant, known as “the salutation” (*namakkāra*), often opens a traditional Buddhist puja.

5 Then she said to him, “Please go, brahmin! I’ve never seen anyone who could worst the Lord [the Blessed One] in a debate. Even so, go and ask the Lord a question.”

6 The brahmin went before the Teacher, and without even saluting him, stood on one side, and asked him this question in verse:¹¹

7	<i>Kiṃsu chetvā sukhaṃ seti kiṃsu chetvā na socati kissassu eka,dhammassa vadhaṃ rocesi gotamāti</i>	Slaying what, one sleeps in comfort? Slaying what, one sorrows not? Of what one thing, whose killing do you approve, Gotama?
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In answer, the Teacher spoke this verse:

8	<i>Kodhaṃ chetvā sukhaṃ seti kodhaṃ chetvā na socati kodhassa visa,mūlassa madhur’aggassa brāhmaṇa vadhaṃ ariyā pasamsanti tañhi chetvā na socatīti</i>	Having slain anger, one sleeps in comfort. Having slain anger, one sorrows not. Anger, with its poisoned root and honeyed tip, brahmin— killing this, the noble ones praise. For, having slain this, one sorrows not.
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9 Showing faith in the Teacher, he went forth and attained arhathood.

10 Now as for the younger brother Akkosaka Bhāra,dvāja, he heard this:

“It seems to me that your brother has gone forth,” and was angered.

11 He went to the Teacher and abused him with rough and unpleasant words. But the Teacher subdued him, too, with the parable of the food given to a guest. Inspired with faith, he too went forth and attained arhathood.¹²

12 As for his two younger brothers—Sundaraika Bhāra,dvāja and Bilingika Bhāra,dvāja—they, too, abused the teachers. The Teacher tamed them, and they, too, went forth and attained arhathood.¹³

13 Then one day, in the Dharma hall, this talk arose,

“Avuso, how marvellous are the virtues of the Buddha! Although these four brothers abused the Teacher, he did not say as much as a word, became their refuge!¹⁴

14 The Teacher came, and asked, “What now, bhikshus, are you talking about as you sit here assembled?”

“Such and such,” they said.

15 “Bhikshus, on account of my accomplishment in the power of patience and not being defiled by any defilement, I am the refuge of the multitude.”¹⁵

Then, he uttered this verse:

16	<i>Akkosaṃ vadha,bandhañ ca aduṭṭho yo titikkhati khantī,balaṃ balānīkaṃ tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇan ti.</i>	Abuse, flogging, and binding [imprisonment], who without anger endures with patience as his power, strength for his army— him I call a brahmin. (Dh 399)
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¹⁰ *Idāni te vasali gantvā tassa satthuno vādaṃ āropessāmīti āha.*

¹¹ This is a well known riddle (and its answer) in **Sa,gāthā Vagga** (S 1): (**Devatā**) **Chetvā S** (S 223-224*/1.71/-1:41, asked by a devata); **Māgha S** (S 257-258*/2.3/1:47, Sakra); **Dhanañjānī S** (S 613-614*/7.1/1:161); (**Sakka**) **Chetvā S** (S 939-940*/11.21/1:237, Sakra). Quoted at Nett 145. These verses are practically identical except for the occasional vocative addressing the interlocutor.

¹² *So’pi satthārā atithīnaṃ khādanīy’ādi,dāna,opammena saññatto satthari pasanno pabbajitvā arahattam pāpuṇi.*

¹³ *Apare’pi’ssa sundarika bhāra,dvājo bilingaka bhāra,dvājo’ti dve kaniṭṭha,bhātaro satthāraṃ akkosantā’va satthārā vinītā pabbajitvā arahattam pāpuṇimsu.*

¹⁴ *Avuso, acchariyā vata buddha,guṇā, catūsū nāma bhātikesu akkosantesu satthā kiñci avatvā tesam yeva patiṭṭhā jāto ti.*

¹⁵ *Bhikkhave ahaṃ mama khanti,balena samannāgatattā duṭṭhesu adussanto mahā,janassa patiṭṭhā homi yevāti.*

[Commentary omitted]¹⁶

17 At the end of the teaching, many attained the fruits of streamwinning, and so on.

The Dhanañjānī Discourse

S 7.1

1 Thus have I heard.

The Blessed One was once staying in the squirrels' feeding ground, in the Bamboo Grove, near Rāja-gaha.

The brahminee's deep faith

2 At that time, a brahminee named Dhanañjānī, the wife of a certain brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan, was deeply faithful in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.¹⁷

3 Now, while the brahminee Dhanañjānī was bringing the brahmin his meal, she stumbled¹⁸ and uttered this udana [inspired utterance]:

*Namo tassa bhagavato
arahato sammā,sambuddhassa*

Homage to him, the Lord [Blessed One],
the arhat [the worthy], the fully self-awakened one!

*Namo tassa bhagavato
arahato sammā,sambuddhassa*

Homage to him, the Lord,
the arhat, the fully self-awakened one!

*Namo tassa bhagavato
arahato sammā,sambuddhassa*

Homage to him, the Lord,
the arhat, the fully self-awakened one!¹⁹

Bhāra,dvāja approaches the Buddha

4 When this was said, the brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan said this to her:

“For just merely this, this wretched woman²⁰ utters praise to that shaveling! Now, wretched woman, I will refute the word of that teacher of yours!”

¹⁶ Brief DhA comy has be omitted. For a more detailed comy, see SA 1:229.

¹⁷ Neither the texts nor Comys give us any information about how she becomes a streamwinner, but see Intro (1).

¹⁸ “She stumbled,” *upakkhalitvā*, lit “having stumbled,” with Ee as *upakkamitvā* (“having approached, gone to”); but most MSS have *upakkhalitvā* (Be), also found in (Deva) Saṅgārava S (M 100,2/2:209 @ SD 10.9), where it reads *pakkhalitvā* (MA 3:451), which means either “having stumbled” or “having washed.” Brahmins often wash themselves before a ceremonial event. IB Horner suggests, “I have chosen to render by ‘stumbled’ in conformity with the context. The *udāna* (solemn or inspired utterance) may then be an expression used for warding off the ill-luck which might otherwise ensue after stumbling” (M:H 2:398). However, considering the fact that Dhanañjānī is a streamwinner, and as such, not superstitious, she utters the Salutation (*namo tassa...*) either as a Buddhānussati or simply to regain her mindfulness after stumbling. Cf Mahv 3:223. See (Deva) Saṅgārava S (M 100), SD 10.9 (3.1) on arctic hysteria.

¹⁹ The narrative up to this point is also found in (Deva) Saṅgārava S (M 100.2/1:109 f @ SD 10.9), with however a different turn: Dhanañjānī utters the udana before 500 brahmins. Apparently, Dhanañjānī is in the habit of making this inspired utterance: as such, this narrative could be a separate incident, or it could be on the same occasion as the Saṅyutta narrative. Comy here says that Bhāra,dvāja has invited 500 brahmins for a banquet of “dry milk-rice” (*ap-p’odaka pāyasa*. lit “milk-rice with little water”) (SA 1:226). For details, see (Deva) Saṅgārava S (M 100), SD 10.9 (1.2).

²⁰ “Wretched woman,” *vasalī*. This is a strong expletive of contempt, used by brahmins to address outcastes. See eg Vasala S (Sn 1.7), SD 72.2.

5 “I do not see anyone, brahmin, in this world with its gods, with its Māra, with its Brahmā, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers²¹ and people, who could refute the teaching of the Blessed One, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one.

But go, brahmin. After you have gone, you will understand.”

The Buddha answers Bhāra,dvāja

6 Then the brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan, angry and displeased, approached the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side. [161]

7 Seated thus at one side, the brahmin of the Bhāradvāja clan addressed the Blessed One in verse:²²

7.2 <i>Kiṃsu chetvā sukhaṃ seti,</i>	Having slain what does one sleep happily?	
<i>kiṃsu chetvā na socati;</i>	Having slain what does one not sorrow?	
<i>kiss ’assu eka ’dhammassa,</i>	What is that one thing,	
<i>vadhaṃ rocesi Gotamā ti.</i>	O Gotama, whose killing you approve of?	613

8 <i>Kodhaṃ chetvā sukhaṃ seti,</i>	Having slain anger, one sleeps happily.	
<i>kodhaṃ chetvā na socati;</i>	Having slain anger, one sorrows not.	
<i>kodhassa visa,mūlassa,</i>	Anger with its poisonous root	
<i>madhur ’aggassa brāhmaṇa;</i>	and honeyed shoot, O brahmin,	
<i>vadhaṃ ariyā pasamsanti,</i>	their killing, the noble ones praise:	
<i>tañ hi chetvā na socatī ti.</i>	for, having slain them, one sorrows not.	614

Bhāra,dvāja joins the order

9 When this was said, the brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan said this to the Blessed One:

“Excellent, Master Gotama! Excellent! Master Gotama!

Just as if one

were to place upright what had been overturned,

were to reveal what was hidden,

were to show the way to one who was lost, or

were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,

in the same way, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.

I go to the Blessed Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.

May the Blessed Gotama give me the going-forth (*pabbajjā*), give me the ordination (*upasampadā*).”

10 And the brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan received the going-forth and the ordination in the Blessed One’s presence.

Bhāra,dvāja becomes an arhat

11 And, not long after he was ordained, the venerable Bhāra,dvāja, dwelling alone, aloof (from society), diligent, exertive, and resolute, realizing it (liberation) for himself through his own direct knowledge, here and now, entered and dwelt in that unsurpassed goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.”²³

And the venerable Bhāra,dvāja became one of the arhats.

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²¹ “Rulers,” *devā*, here in the sense of “devas by convention” (*sammati,deva*), ie kings. The other 2 types of *deva* are “gods by rebirth” (*upapatti,deva*) and “gods by purification” (*visuddhi,deva*), ie the Buddhas, Pratyeka Buddhas and arhats (Nc 307 KhA 123).

²² S 7.1/1:161 = 1.71 = 2.3. See Intro (3).

²³ On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see SD 6.3 (5).